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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MONTERREY 000041

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SUBJECT: VIOLENCE IN DURANGO AND COAHUILA CONTINUES TO ESCALATE

REF: MONTERREY 22

CLASSIFIED BY: Bruce Williamson, Consul General; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

1. (C) Summary: Recent shootings in Durango and neighboring Coahuila states have underscored the increasingly violent rivalry between the rival drug cartels in those states, primarily the Zetas and the Sinaloa Cartel. Since the year began, over 105 people have died in drug-related violence in both states (as of February 5), with this period marked by incidents that have included a major prison riot, a bar massacre, and a gun battle between police and drug cartel members. While corruption, violence and increased drug cartel activity are evident throughout Post's consular district, Durango is the state unraveling most rapidly. The upcoming gubernatorial campaign, combined with the July election and transfer of power in September, will likely only aggravate matters as the cartels seek to expand their influence at the political level. End summary.

Gang Rivalry Evident in Durango Prison Riot

2. (C) A January 20 prison riot that broke out in the early morning hours at the state prison in the city of Durango resulted in 24 deaths and at least 20 injuries. Media reporting suggested that a clash between incarcerated members of the Sinaloa and Zeta drug trafficking organizations precipitated the event. The prisoners fought mostly with sharp instruments made of wood and metal, but one prisoner was found shot to death. Local state and federal police joined soldiers from the 10th Military District in attempting to quell the riot, although the troops and federal police did not arrive until 30-45 minutes after prison officials called for help. On January 26, the state government relieved Durango Prison Director Juvenal Zamora while it investigated the incident. (Note: USAID contractors in discussion with Durango state officials over Merida Initiative-related judicial reform were trapped at a nearby government building for several hours as the riot raged outside. End note.)

3. (SBU) The incident was the seventh major prison riot in the state over the last 15 months; all told, these riots have resulted in 68 prisoner deaths. The prison is notoriously overcrowded, holding over 2,200 inmates in a facility designed for 1,700 to 1,800. (Comment: Media reports speculated that the fight between the rival cartels began as a dispute over drug distribution rights in the prison. Post has not been able to confirm this report. End comment.)

Bar Patrons Attacked

¶4. (SBU) On February 1, an early morning attack by four gunmen on a bar in Torreon, Coahuila left ten people dead and 18 injured. The majority of the victims were young adults between 19 to 25 years old. The gunmen also opened fire on the exteriors of two adjacent bars, injuring one victim. According to Torreon police chief General Carlos Bibiano Villa Castillo, prior to arriving at the bar, the assailants went to three restaurants and attacked the owners, demanding to know who they "worked for" and other details implying they were seeking out rival drug gang related businesses (although they did not identify themselves as being affiliated with any particular gang). Several days before, a YouTube video (www.youtube.com/watch?v=AIY_Q_GXsNw) had surfaced warning residents of the Laguna area (i.e., Torreon, Coahuila and Gomez Palacio, Durango) to stay away from Zeta-owned bars and nightclubs in the region.

Police Shootout With the Zetas

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¶5. (SBU) Later that day in Torreon, at around 6:00 pm., a shootout erupted at a mall between Federal police and members of the Zetas drug gang after police attempted to rescue two kidnap victims held by gang members, sending patrons scrambling for cover and closing shops. A running gun battle ensued, resulting in the death of seven Zetas and one police officer. Police managed to rescue both kidnap victims.

Comment

¶6. (C) Due to a surge in cartel violence, Durango and Coahuila are becoming increasingly volatile and corrupt. Former Nuevo Leon Director General of State Investigation Hector Santos, known by Post to have direct ties with the Zetas, is now serving in the same post in Coahuila. The USAID contractors who recently visited Durango told the Consul General on February 4 that they no longer had confidence in the police force and will find judicial training programs difficult to conduct in that environment. Indeed, RSO sources in that state have either disappeared or taken a low profile in recent months.

¶7. (C) Post ATF Attache has obtained shell casings from the recent shootout between the military and Zeta kidnapers in Torreon, Coahuila from the state attorney general's office to compare with those taken from the scene of the killing of U.S. citizen Augustin Roberto "Bobby" Salcedo in Durango on December 31 (reftel). However, the crime remains unsolved and it is not clear if this is due to unwillingness or a lack of efficiency on the part of Durango's police officials. Another key factor will be the willingness of witnesses to come forward given the threat of cartel retaliation if they assist authorities.

¶8. (C) More alarmingly, the lead Durango official investigating the Salcedo murder case, Manuel Acosta, died on January 26 as the result of gunshot wounds sustained in a January 15 attack near his

office. Authorities did not reveal that he was alive and in the hospital due to fears that gang members would kill him there. It is unknown whether the attack on Acosta was due to his role in pursuing the Salcedo investigation or whether the killers had another reason for wanting him dead. On February 10, the Durango State Attorney General's office provide ATF with shell casings from related shootings in the state, including the assassination of Acosta, which ATF will attempt to connect to the Salcedo shooting and other crimes.

19. (C) Torreon, Coahuila is the sister city of Gomez Palacios, Durango, which is reputedly under the control of the Sinaloa Cartel. Torreon is Zeta territory and both groups have a bloody history of conflict. Ominously, a late-January YouTube video posted by a group calling itself "Mexico United Against the Cartels" warned citizens of Torreon and Gomez Palacio against frequenting Zeta-owned bars and nightclubs in either city, declaring that the battle would continue until the Zetas were eliminated. Post could not immediately determine the sponsors of the YouTube video. Given past strategies used by Mexico's convoluted underworld drug gangs, it could have been posted by any number of rival cartels - or even by the Zetas themselves to deflect blame for the killings. One thing appears to be evident; the latest violence is the result of gang warfare for control of a broader swath of territory and threatens to turn the rivalry into a wider conflict in both states.

WILLIAMSON